

A New Era of Opportunity

OVERVIEW

Downtown Wichita today offers a level of opportunity to enhance the region's economic growth and quality of life that hasn't been seen in 50 years. After years of development trends that emptied Downtown of many of its people, businesses and amenities, the tide has reversed, with new residents and businesses joining the still-significant concentrations of office, hotel and institutional activity downtown. Just as Downtown's earlier loss of investment echoed trends in cities all over America, so to does its ongoing revival reflect renewed interest all over the country—largely based in long-term demographic trends—in the benefits downtowns have to offer as places not only to work, but to live, learn, shop and spend leisure time.

Principal factors setting the stage for a new era of opportunity in Downtown Wichita:

- Downtown is increasingly an economic engine that attracts talent and investment that make the region competitive. More so than other places in the region, Downtown Wichita offers the combination of ingredients that attract creative workers and help spark business innovation: jobs, housing, restaurants, entertainment and other amenities all within a few minutes of each other.
- Today, economic diversity, jobs and investment follow skilled and creative younger workers. These workers often base their choice of where to live first on lifestyle, and then proceed to find a job that suits them. Businesses



Downtown's special places make it a community destination for the region

increasingly locate to be near these workers, who favor living and working in vibrant downtowns. Already, Downtown Wichita's cafes are full of younger workers doing creative and entrepreneurial work in a social setting. Younger singles and couples exert more than 70% of the demand for living downtown. The current economic



Downtown appeals to young and creative people who will be key to Wichita's future economic prosperity.

downturn may actually amplify this trend by helping retain more younger and creative workers who previously would have been attracted to places like Chicago and Portland, and they are part of broad demographic trends that are much more “downtown friendly.” For instance, 63% of Wichita’s households include just one or two people—a percentage above the national average—the size category most interested in downtown living. On the other hand, 65% of Wichita’s current housing stock is composed of traditional single-family homes, which are often larger or further from amenities than smaller households prefer. Hence, a number of smaller households, whether younger singles and couples starting out, or empty-nesters and other baby-boomers seeking a downsized home closer to services, increasingly look to Downtown with interest.

Twenty years of successful reinvestment in Old Town, visible in the distance, is generating demand for more reinvestment that can revive empty lots and buildings in other downtown districts



- People of all ages are more interested in shopping and playing Downtown. Downtown offers a level of choice, an appeal to a diverse community, and a sense of place and authenticity that many of its competitors lack.
- Downtown boasts advantages—historic buildings, reduced energy costs, walkability. Downtown’s historic buildings—through their character and ability to tap historic tax-credit financing—and walkability have been central to Old Town’s



The INTRUST Bank Arena is attracting more people from the region downtown

successful revival and vibrancy. They continue to be just as important today in attracting reinvestment all over Downtown. Downtown’s walkability has improved, with added sidewalk improvements, residents and pedestrian-oriented businesses, and it will only continue to grow as streets become places for people. Downtown’s market-based development opportunities all increase to the extent Downtown is walkable. As energy costs rise, the cost savings that Downtown offers households and businesses thanks to its efficient development pattern will become another increasingly important asset.

- The time to act on these opportunities is now. Peer cities like Oklahoma City are busy promoting downtown reinvestment and recruiting new businesses and residents. Further, there is real near-term opportunity to seize in Downtown Wichita. Even in this economically challenging year, private entrepreneurs have begun or completed a number of significant market-based development projects



Construction of a new hotel at WaterWalk.

Downtown, including the Cargill Innovation Center, Flats 324, Finn Lofts, WaterWalk Fairfield Inn, and renovations at the Broadview and Hyatt Hotels. These demonstrate Downtown's fundamental market appeal, whatever the economic cycle. Putting a new plan in place now sets the framework to attract more successful Downtown investment in the coming years.

The analyses in this chapter of market, transportation, urban design and planning conditions Downtown reveal a solid foundation of opportunity surpassing anything Wichita has seen in two generations. These conditions demand a new and bigger perspective on Downtown's possibilities.



Even in the midst of a challenging economy, the Flats 324 housing development—an adaptive reuse of the former Wichita High School building, at left—rented all its 68 units promptly between January and June 2010, demonstrating downtown’s significant market appeal.



Downtown has attracted significant new office tenants in recent years, including High Touch.

Market-Demand Analyses

Overview

Market-based development opportunities form one of the fundamental bases for conceiving and implementing the vision of the *Master Plan for Wichita*. Three nationally-recognized specialists in their respective areas—Laurie Volk of Zimmerman/Volk Associates; Sarah Woodworth of W-ZHA; and Michael Berne of MJB Consulting—conducted residential, hotel, office, and retail market demand analyses specific to the study area in 2009-2010. The residential market analysis projects demand for the coming 5 to 7 years (extrapolated to 10 years for purposes of creating development scenarios), and the office and hotel analysis projects demand for the coming 10 years. The retail analysis focused on identifying “niche” markets and employed a psychographic methodology as a key component of its review process. The key findings for each market area are summarized here; full reports for each area appear in Appendix 1.

Residential Market

BASE MARKET ANALYSIS

Zimmerman/Volk Associates analyzed housing market potential in the downtown study area based on long-term demographic trends, a key predictor of demand in emerging markets for walkable mixed-use neighborhoods. This analysis assumes that the area will continue to develop with walkable, mixed-use districts; if that does not happen, demand forecasts would be significantly lower. Key findings from the study include:

- Mirroring national trends, the potential market for new market-rate housing located within downtown is dominated by younger singles and couples, followed by empty nesters and retirees. Younger singles and couples are the most significant, comprising 70 percent of the market, while empty nesters and retirees account for 20 percent. Traditional and nontraditional families make up the remaining 9 percent (the figures here do not add to 100 percent because of rounding).
 - > 75 percent of the younger singles and couples would be moving to downtown from elsewhere in Sedgwick County, 3 percent would be moving from the regional and secondary draw areas, and 18 percent would be moving from elsewhere in the U.S.
 - > 30 percent of empty nesters and retirees would be relocating to downtown from other neighborhoods within Wichita; 30 percent would be moving from Sedgwick County; 10 percent would come from the regional and secondary draw areas; and the remaining 26 percent would be from elsewhere in the U.S.
- Analysis also revealed that approximately 63 percent of Wichita’s existing households have one or two people, while approximately two-thirds of the region’s housing stock consists of single-family homes. Because the greatest interest in living in walkable downtown neighborhoods comes from one- and two-person households, and because single-family homes may not always meet the location and size preferences of these households, downtown offers important opportunity to offer housing options that respond to unmet demand.

- ▶ Market opportunity exists for approximately 1,000 housing units over 5 to 7 years (and about 1,500 units over the next 10 years).

EXHIBIT 2-1

Optimum Market Position: Market-Rate Dwelling Units in Downtown Wichita

HOUSING TYPE	BASE RENT/PRICE RANGE*	BASE UNIT SIZE RANGE (SQ. FT.)	BASE RENT/PRICE PER SQ. FT.*	ANNUAL MARKET CAPTURE
MULTIFAMILY RENTAL				
HARD LOFT <i>Open floorplan/1ba</i>	\$500 to \$1,300	450 to 1,100	\$1.18 to \$1.22	134 UNITS
SOFT LOFT <i>Studios to two-bedrooms</i>	\$750 to \$1,500	550 to 1,200	\$1.25 to \$1.36	
UPSCALE APARTMENT <i>One- to three-bedrooms</i>	\$1,200 to \$1,900	800 to 1,400	\$1.36 to \$1.50	
MULTIFAMILY OWNERSHIP				
HARD LOFT <i>Open floorplan/1ba</i>	\$150,000 to \$250,000	700 to 1,250	\$200 to \$214	48 UNITS
SOFT LOFT <i>One- and two-bedrooms</i>	\$195,000 to \$300,000	800 to 1,400	\$214 to \$244	
UPSCALE APARTMENT <i>Two- and three-bedrooms</i>	\$275,000 to \$400,000	1,000 to 1,650	\$242 to \$275	
SINGLE-FAMILY ATTACHED OWNERSHIP				
TOWNHOUSE/ROWHOUSE <i>Two- and three-bedrooms</i>	\$225,00 to \$350,000	1,100 to 1,800	\$194 to \$205	18 UNITS
LIVE-WORK UNIT <i>one- and two-bedrooms + 500sf ground-floor work space</i>	\$325,00 to \$375,000	1,350 to 1,600	\$234 to \$241	

* Base rent/price ranges are in 2010 dollars and exclude of floor/view premiums, options, and upgrades.

source: Zimmerman/Volk Associates, Inc.

- From a market perspective, the assets of downtown Wichita that make it an attractive place to live include:
 - > Historic buildings
 - > Employment opportunities
 - > Culture and entertainment
 - > Shopping and dining
 - > Walkability
 - > Location and access
- From a market perspective, the major challenges are:
 - > Neglected or vacant properties
 - > High costs
 - > Misconceptions about parking
 - > Non-automobile transportation

In terms of actual market opportunity, the analysis determined that:

- Market opportunity exists for approximately 1,000 housing units over the next 5 to 7 years (and about 1,500 units over the next 10 years).
- These units could be absorbed at a rate of up to 150-200 units per year (not including turnover).

Exhibit 2-1, left, summarizes the optimal breakdown of unit types and associated size and price ranges for this target market.

PROJECTED LONG-TERM MARKET-BASED DEMAND

Longer-term projection assumes that a similar rate of demand will continue 10 to 15 years beyond the short-term time frame because the demographic trends that form the basis of the projected demand are expected to continue for 15 to 20 years. These include a continuing decline in the number of households with children, which could drop to as low as

14% of all households in 20 years. That makes it reasonable to assume that over the longer-term demand would match or exceed the rate expected in the near term. Zimmerman/Volk has found in similar communities that housing demand in walkable environments tends to accelerate over time. Likewise, the University of Michigan's Christopher Leinberger has found in his research that the success of dense, walkable, mixed-use centers adds to demand for adjacent areas based upon the appreciating value and increasing desirability of high-quality walkable urban development. In effect, the

success achieved in creating a dense, high-quality, walkable mixed-use environment within downtown Wichita will help shape and drive future demand for additional housing.

Office Market

BASE MARKET ANALYSIS

W-ZHA analyzed the demand for office space in the study area, also assuming the creation of walkable, mixed-use districts. Some of the findings included:

- Sedgwick County's office occupancy has grown at an annualized rate of 1.2 percent per year since 1990, driven primarily by professional service sectors, and this trend is expected to continue.
- While Class-A vacancy rates in downtown Wichita are low, and such spaces command lower lease rates than their suburban counterparts (\$14–\$16 per square foot downtown compared to \$20 or more per square foot in the suburbs), downtown continues to lose share of the overall Wichita office market.
- No multitenant Class-A office buildings have been added downtown for two decades. In general, the supply of office space has changed little in the downtown market since 1990.
- Since 2000, total occupied Downtown office space has declined at a compound rate of roughly 1 percent per year. During the same period, occupied suburban office space has increased from approximately 2.9 million square feet to 4.25 million square feet, or a rate of nearly 5 percent per year (Exhibit 2-2 summarizes the changes in both markets over this period). As a result, downtown's share of regional multitenant office space slipped from 50% in 2000 to 42% in 2008.
- Despite these findings, Downtown remains the region's office hub, with its highest concentration of office space.

EXHIBIT 2-2

Comparative Growth Rates: Downtown vs. Suburban Office Markets (000s of sq. ft.)

YEAR	CBD OFFICE SPACE			SUBURBAN OFFICE SPACE		
	TOTAL	VACANT	OCCUPIED	TOTAL	VACANT	OCCUPIED
2000	3,409	21.2%	2,687	2,892	13.8%	2,494
2001	3,228	23.8%	2,460	3,246	15.9%	2,731
2002	3,576	26.2%	2,638	3,816	18.9%	3,096
2003	3,960	24.8%	2,977	4,060	18.0%	3,329
2004	3,973	24.3%	3,009	4,036	14.4%	3,454
2005	3,815	24.3%	2,889	4,072	15.2%	3,453
2006	3,486	22.5%	2,701	3,804	14.0%	3,273
2007	3,247	25.6%	2,417	3,815	11.7%	3,370
2008	3,133	21.4%	2,463	4,251	10.8%	3,793
Total increase	(276)		(224)	1,359		1,299
CAGR*	-1.0%		-1.1%	4.9%		5.4%

* CAGR = compounded annual growth rate.

Source: Grubb & Ellis/Martens Commercial Group; W-ZHA LLC.

Downtown office space comprises roughly 64% multitenant buildings, 20% owner-occupied space, and 16% public-sector space.

CRITICAL FACTORS

While the initial findings describe challenges for Downtown Wichita, they also present some very real opportunities. The study identified critical factors that will need to be understood and addressed in order to increase downtown office tenancies. They are:

- **Parking:** Existing Class-A buildings maintain high occupancies. They tend, however, to be located on the periphery of downtown and provide suburban-style parking. Successfully incorporating additional Class-A buildings into Downtown's core may require public-private parking solutions.
- **Space availability:** A lack of available high-quality office space in downtown has contributed to several recent corporate relocations from downtown to suburban Wichita. In fact, there is only enough existing space to accommodate two or three tenants seeking relatively large amounts of contiguous space (i.e., 15,000 square feet). Assuming that current downtown tenants continue to grow and require more space, downtown will not be able to accommodate or promote growth without the introduction of new, quality space.
- **Quality of supply:** The newest Class-A multitenant office buildings in downtown are at least 20 years old. Newly constructed office buildings are better tailored for today's business operations. It is difficult to discern whether downtown's rental rate of \$14–\$16 per square foot is a

function of weak demand or of limited supply. Downtown will need a supply of quality office space in order to attract new businesses and maintain existing ones.

- **Price:** As mentioned, downtown is highly competitive on price: its \$14–\$16 lease rates are consistently lower than suburban Class-A rates, which frequently exceed \$20. This advantage is offset by the lack of quality space as well as a perception that downtown is not Wichita's premiere location. A further issue is that new construction requires developers to set rents closer to \$25 per square foot, which would put new space on par with suburban competition. Maintaining a competitive price point will be important to attracting and increasing commercial occupants in downtown.
- **Urban environment:** While downtown Wichita has sustained a long-term decline, recent successes—the revitalization of Old Town, Airbus's expansion in downtown, the 50,000-plus-square-foot High Touch lease, new residential developments, and the opening of the INTRUST Bank Arena—have restored a sense of vitality. Downtown has the potential to bolster its competitive position as the region's urban center if it can offer an attractive, mixed-use walkable environment. It must further develop its retail, restaurant, cultural entertainment and other leisure-oriented amenities to become a more competitive office location. Forging attractive, walkable, mixed-use environments will differentiate downtown from the suburban market.
- **Labor proximity:** Upscale suburban neighborhoods are located primarily in Wichita's eastern and (increasingly)

western areas. Office development has followed the labor market to the suburbs. As the labor market has spread both east and west across the metro area, downtown's central location has become a major market advantage.

Within the next 10 years, Downtown could support 220,000 to 480,000sf of new office development.

DOWNTOWN OFFICE MARKET OUTLOOK AND PROJECTION

The analysis generated two "market-based" forecasts. One was a conservative scenario based primarily on prevailing trends. The second scenario, slightly more aggressive, envisions the potential that can be reasonably anticipated if conditions

evolve as prescribed in the Downtown Master Plan. Both projections are significant for downtown. Based on a number of factors:

- Occupied multitenant office space in the Wichita region could increase by 472,000 to 779,000 square feet over the next 10 years. The conservative scenario assumes that downtown would maintain its current share (42 percent) of the overall Wichita multitenant office supply. The more aggressive scenario assumes that downtown would capture 50 percent of new growth and begin to recapture a small portion of its recently lost market share. Applying these calculation, downtown would support roughly 200,000–390,000 square feet of new space.
- In terms of new development, the 200,000- to 390,000-square-foot range represents only the occupied portion of new multitenant office development. Assuming a stabilized vacancy rate of 92 percent, actual development would range from 215,000 to 423,000 square feet or more. Adding in potential for new owner-occupied space, total office development could reach 480,000 square feet.

EXHIBIT 2-3

Downtown Wichita Office Market: 10-Year Growth Potential

	PREVAILING TRENDS	CONDITIONAL POTENTIAL
Current occupied space	6,256,000	6,256,000
10-yr. compounded annual growth rate ¹	0.73%	1.18%
10-yr. projected office growth	472,021	779,205
Downtown share ²	42%	50%
Net downtown occupancy growth	198,249	389,602
Stabilized vacancy adjustment	0.92	0.92
New office development potential	215,488	423,481

¹ The Prevailing Trends growth rate based on economy.com employment forecast. The Conditional Potential growth rate combines consideration of two factors:

- The 30-year forecast of employment demand (if unconstrained by labor supply) of 1.5%/year produced in 2004 by the Wichita Metropolitan Area Planning Department. Given forecasted labor supply, actual employment growth is forecasted at 0.5%/year.
- Previous long-term (1990-2008) employment growth occurred at an annualized rate of 1.18%. Given these data, employment growth may exceed current economy.com forecasts.

² Public- as well as private-sector actions can potentially improve downtown market prospects and enable downtown to recapture some of the market share lost in recent decades.

Source: W-ZHA, LLC.

KEY FINDINGS ON DOWNTOWN OFFICE MARKET

In addition to the outlook and projections, W-ZHA noted several other key findings that will aid in increasing office occupancy downtown. These are:

- **Modest scale:** New office buildings will likely range from 40,000 to 80,000 square feet. It be difficult to achieve the pre-leasing thresholds required by lenders for buildings much larger in scale. Buildings five stories or less can be

“stick-built,” which is less expensive than mid- and high-rise construction. With lower costs comes lower rents.

- **“Cool space”:** Cool space offices are located in older buildings that are architecturally distinct and within walking distance of restaurants. A share of the office market will locate in these types of buildings, and developments can often take advantage of historic tax credits. Reinvestment in existing historic structures also removes the negative impacts associated with vacancy and blight and enhances the authenticity and vibrancy of urban areas.
- **Price point:** New office development will require a rent level of at least \$25 per square foot to offset construction costs and operating expenses. In order to achieve these rents, downtown must offer a distinctly “urban” product. Therefore, new buildings must be developed in (or adjacent to) those districts that offer restaurants, entertainment, services and housing within easy walking distance.
- **Parking:** Office buildings will require parking within easy walking distance of the building. Public/private financing will be necessary to support the development of structured parking to service downtown land uses and should become a municipal priority. Parking should be sited in locations with the greatest potential for 24-hour use.

Within the next ten years, downtown Wichita could potentially support an additional 250 to 400 rooms.

Hotel Market

W-ZHA also studied the market for hotels in downtown. They found that overall the Wichita market has consistently outperformed the national market since

2006. Moreover, the market continues to grow and maintains a relatively high occupancy rates. The report does note, however, that almost 85 percent of all hotel rooms are found in Wichita’s suburbs.

W-ZHA found that performance for downtown and its four existing hotels exceeded the Wichita market as a whole. In fact, they achieve higher occupancies even when charging considerably higher average daily rates (ADR). The revenue per available room (RevPAR) has been approximately 50% higher than the overall Wichita market.

The downtown lodging market outlook and projections are strong and reflect four considerations:

- **Office ratios:** While downtown has a 42 percent share of the Wichita office market, downtown hotel rooms account for just 16 percent of the overall lodging market supply. Since hotels derive most of their demand from the “business transient,” this indicates that the downtown market is significantly underserved. As office demand growth resumes in downtown, there will be an even greater increase in lodging demand.
- **Convention business:** Downtown maintains the dominant position in the Wichita convention and meetings market. Compared to similar cities, Wichita is substantially undersupplied with lodging rooms. Over the next ten years, growth in convention/meeting activity could likely support a 25 to 40 percent increase in downtown rooms.

- **Downtown amenities:** Access between downtown and suburban Wichita is not difficult, and downtown's features and amenities increasingly provide compelling reasons for travelers to stay downtown.

EXHIBIT 2-4

Lodging Market Occupancy Rates (Wichita & U.S., 2003-09)

YEAR	WICHITA	U.S. ¹
2003	58.9%	59.2%
2004	62.0%	61.4%
2005	63.0%	63.1%
2006	66.4%	63.3%
2007	65.2%	63.1%
2008	65.0%	60.3%
2009 ²	59.2%	55.2%

¹ Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers

² 2009 figures are through November for the Wichita market and forecasted as of November 9, 2009, for the national market.

- **Underserved niches:** While the full-service niche is fairly well served, downtown contains a limited supply of properties in limited-service, middle-market and budget categories. Considering the low land costs (\$30–\$50 per square foot) and the strong performances at the Hotel at Old Town and Courtyard by Marriott properties, a real opportunity appears to exist to increase the number of limited-service hotels within downtown.

Overall, the W-ZHA report found that, within the next ten years, Downtown Wichita could potentially support an additional 250 to 400 rooms.

EXHIBIT 2-5

Lodging Industry Growth Potential (Downtown Study Area)

YEAR	SEGMENT SHARE	CURRENT ROOM SUPPLY	GROWTH POTENTIAL (ROOMS)	
			LOW	HIGH
General business	40%	311	6.9% (21)	13.5% (42)
Meetings	40%	311	25% (78)	40% (124)
Leisure/other (Arena)	20%	155	50% (78)	75% (117)
Net total room increase	100%	777	100% (177)	100% (283)
Adjustments: replace room reduction at Broadview			30	30
Adjusted net total room increase			207	313

Source: W-ZHA

Retail Market

MJB Consulting took an innovative approach to its retail analysis of downtown Wichita. Understanding that retail—particularly retail in urban settings—can no longer be analyzed from a mass-market perspective, MJB focused instead on niche markets within retail. Furthermore, the MJB analysis utilized a psychographic method that characterizes markets qualitatively in terms of members' lifestyle preferences, sensibilities, and aspirations. Rather than trying to appeal to everybody, the approach to enhancing the retail mix of Downtown Wichita should be one of identifying which ones would be the most promising. The niches identified and how they could best impact downtown were:

- **“Hipster:”** Young, creatively- and alternatively-minded types who live in and are drawn to the underground. Hipsters tend to be the “early adopters” who set trends and pioneer neighborhoods. Hipster-oriented businesses include vintage clothing shops, funky shoe stores, skate and bike stores, etc. The most appropriate location for such retailers would be in Delano, along West Douglas Avenue between McLean Boulevard and Seneca Street, given the cluster of hipster-oriented businesses already there.
- **“Yupster:”** A blend of a “yuppie” and a “hipster.” The yupster will typically have a more established career and earn more money than the hipster, and she can range in age from young professional to empty nester, but she shares the same sorts of creative and alternative sensibilities and tends to gravitate to areas that have developed reputations as hip and arty. Yupster-oriented businesses include “upscale bohemian” fashion boutiques and “cross-over” ethnic eateries.

Businesses directed at yupsters should be steered toward Old Town and the emerging Old Town West in order to build upon the success of existing yupster-oriented businesses.

- **Student and Young Adult:** While a certain percentage can be classified as early-stage hipster, the majority are characterized in a more conventional manner. The men are avid sports fans who drink mainstream American beers and tend to prefer sports bars. The women follow mainstream fashion and shop at inexpensive fashion “knockoff” stores like Forever 21. Both enjoy late nights out. Currently there is no identifiable “college drag” within the Wichita area. Businesses catering to students and young adults should be directed to Old Town and surrounding blocks. Examples include “cheap chic” purveyors and dance clubs.

MJB also focused on several other retail factors. These findings include:

- Food and drink offerings appealing to the broadest possible market should be sited within or on the periphery of Old Town, heading toward INTRUST Bank Arena. Examples include “middle-of-the-road” concepts like family restaurants, as well as less conventional ones such as a trendy “retro chic” bowling alley and “casual chic” restaurant/bar combos.
 - > Such establishments are most appropriately located there rather than in the WaterWalk development so as to take full advantage of the synergies of a site within or near downtown’s existing dining and nightlife concentration.
 - > This category of tenant serves a dual purpose, in that it also positions downtown as something that belongs to everyone, a true crossroads that in some ways welcomes

all of Wichita, with businesses that are relevant to a wide audience and not just to one or two narrowly defined niche markets.

- The sorts of retail uses for which WaterWalk would be most appropriate are “one-per-market” brands that are able to stand alone and that seek a central location easily accessible from the entire metro area, making the site’s proximity to U.S. 400/U.S. 54/Kellogg Avenue particularly appealing. The highly successful Gander Mountain store exemplifies this type.
- A retail incubator similar to the Farm & Art Market of the 1990s should be re-introduced, in a location that would not otherwise be leasable to market-driven tenancies. Ideally, however, it might be co-located with a non-retail anchor to ensure a level of foot traffic that gives the individual vendors at least some chance of survival in the early years.
- The Wichita Downtown Development Corporation (WDDC) should consider adding an in-house recruiter, a salaried, full-time employee dedicated solely to identifying and pursuing retail tenant prospects. The person in this position can supplement and support the efforts of brokers by assuming responsibility for the time, extra effort, and risk often involved in trying to fill downtown retail space.
- Considerations should be made for assisting recruitment efforts through the use of direct retail “stimulus” so as to level the playing field for downtown retail, in addition to the standard façade-improvement fund. An example would be a forgivable-loan program to help with tenant build-out.

Transportation Analysis

A successful downtown provides dynamic synergy between people and activities. A mix of great streets and comfortable connections makes this synergy possible. The choices available to move about and the quality of those choices influence people's perceptions of downtown and their willingness to engage in life there. This section documents existing conditions of downtown Wichita's transportation network, identifying the challenges and opportunities for

creating the connections that will frame and fully enable realization of the Downtown master plan .

Downtown Wichita once relied on a variety of transportation modes for its bustling economy. Like this image of Douglas Avenue in the 1920s, the streetcar and private automobiles mix comfortably with pedestrians and other street life. As travelers began to rely more on their cars and downtown activities shifted and reformed the landscape, Wichita's multimodal transportation system was introduced to new challenges, including:

- super-blocks interrupting connections of the original street grid for all users;
- dispersed destinations, gaps between buildings, and poor streetscape conditions that discourage walking; and
- a mix of one-and two-way streets, perceived as confusing for drivers unfamiliar with downtown and its neighborhoods.



A new vision for downtown renews the potential to, once again, intertwine the transportation system and reintroduce the essential characteristics of a complete range of choices for downtown access and circulation. It can build on the significant investment of previous generations, particularly in areas of long-standing destinations and recent development. Each characteristic of circulation, from safety and freedom of movement to wayfinding and aesthetics, can help to brand downtown Wichita as a welcoming place for business, an attractive place to live, and an interesting place to spend an afternoon or an evening of culture and entertainment. The following summarizes the major findings detailed in this report; the complete existing conditions analysis for transportation appears in Appendix 2.

Transportation System Elements

Street Configuration

- Downtown Wichita has been well-defined by its major transportation “infrastructure”: the Arkansas River running north-south to the west, the railway and I-135 to the east, and US 54 to the south. These significant barriers also help to organize the street system so that their few crossing points funnel the majority of traffic into only a handful of streets. The strong network of gridded streets creates redundancy to these links enhancing movement within downtown and is an asset worth preserving and re-establishing in some areas.
- Getting around downtown by car can be an intimidating experience for visitors, newcomers, and long-time Wichitans alike. The barriers of rivers and railroads

and freeways, combined with the mix of one-way and two-way streets (some continuous and others not), make for a confusing—even frustrating—system of streets. Simplifying and reconnecting the street network provides for easy access to downtown and easy orientation for even first-time visitors. It will also be critical to more intuitive, discernable transit routing and transfers.

- Street network issues include the mix of one-way and two-way streets, some of which change how they operate within the downtown; loss of connectivity through the creation of superblocks and placement of buildings in the public street right-of-way; and a lack of appropriately timed signals on some streets. Each of these creates out-of-direction travel and unnecessary delay for motorists trying to get where they want to be efficiently.
- Traffic flows freely in downtown Wichita, even during peak commute times. The wide streets that make up the downtown street network could better integrate other priority users by reallocation of some lanes to transit, bicycling and parking, thereby strengthening downtown for all users.

Pedestrian Environment

- The street grid is a major asset to pedestrian and bicyclists. For pedestrians it provides generally good connectivity between uses, and numerous crossing opportunities at urban-scaled intersections. However, the long north-south blocks coupled with dispersed destinations are less than ideal for travelling on foot around downtown. Further, the introduction of super-blocks has diminished the pedestrian experience in the areas around the Arkansas River.

- Public art has been introduced on many city streets. Coupled with a shaded sidewalk and other landscaping, public art contributes to perceptions of ownership and care for public streets and a general feeling of security for pedestrian travel. As in Old Town and along Douglas Avenue through Delano, the preservation and enhancement of sidewalk amenities and pedestrian-scale streets create unique pedestrian experiences and should be encouraged. Aesthetic designs and materials are detailed in the *Downtown Wichita Streetscape Design Guidelines*, and new installations should be functional and reflect the most up-to-date approaches to ADA accommodation and maintenance.

Bicycle Network

- The City's bicycle planning has focused largely on a recreational path system. Recent routes for on-street bicycling are geared to commuter travel, in and out of downtown. Opportunities exist to enhance circulation and parking for bicycling downtown and for connections from the street system to existing and future recreational bike paths. Streets that invite bicycling as a priority mode should generally run parallel to transit- and auto-priority streets through downtown.
- All vehicles in Wichita Transit's fleet have been equipped with bicycle racks, helping to bridge distances between bus stops and destinations for some riders. Once arrived downtown, the transit-rider may find that access to one's destination is most efficient by bicycle rather than by another bus transfer.

Transit System

- Most existing bus service runs only hourly during the mid-day and every 30 minutes during peak hours, connecting at the Downtown Transit Center to facilitate transfers. The routes reach the Transit Center using many streets, with little concentration of transit activity.
- The visibility of transit service, or presence on the street, is very limited. A few benches denote transit stops, but there are no bus-stop signs or other on-street information.
- The Q-Line operates on a one-way, 30-minute loop in downtown. During heavy travel times, such as Friday and Saturday evenings, a second bus operates a reverse loop. The Q-Line also serves as a parking shuttle for major events at the newly opened INTRUST Arena. Recognition of, and support for, the Q-Line is strong among the Wichita residents.
- Wichita Transit completed a Transit Development Plan that looks at fundamentally altering the existing hub-and-spoke system to address growth that has occurred in Wichita over the past 15-20 years. The transit plan incorporates and supports the elements of the downtown plan, ensuring strong regional transit connections as well as movement within the downtown area. Concentrating transit on fewer streets with fixed stops and clear connections to Q-Line service will be important elements of the transit component of the downtown plan.

- Wichita Transit has invested in Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) equipment and has the ability to improve customer communications, making transit more available to new riders. Communication that gives signal priority to transit vehicles is also possible with the cooperation of and modest investment by the City.

Intermodal Connections

- The existing intercity bus service terminal sits several blocks away and is not visible from the Downtown Transit Center, making the connection between local and interregional travel less than ideal. Intercity bus providers have expressed interest in relocating into the transit center.
- Amtrak service is available 25 miles to the north of downtown Wichita. Historic Union Station and its parking and rail infrastructure are located near the Downtown Transit Center. This major city asset is now privately owned. The Northern Flyer Alliance has been leading advocacy efforts to return Amtrak service to downtown. A series of studies and recent legislative action indicate that preserving the use of this landmark infrastructure will be an important outcome of plan implementation.



A downtown “walk-shop” launched the public phase of the planning process in December 2009. Participants fanned out across Downtown on a Saturday to photograph the area’s problems and the things that make it appealing, then helped identify themes through discussions and electronic polling.

Urban Design Analysis

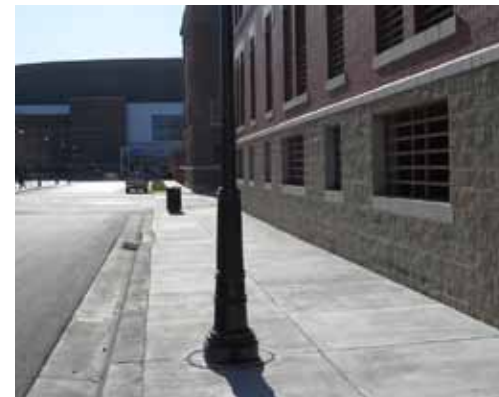
The planning process reviewed key planning and urban design factors that shape downtown's opportunities and challenges, including walkability, land use, cultural destinations, and the potential various properties hold for redevelopment. The resulting assessments played a central role in shaping the illustrative vision plan shown in Chapter 5, The Plan.

Walkability: Would you walk here?

Criteria

The analysis addressed these characteristics:

- **Presence of active ground-floor uses, typically retail, with good visual connection to the sidewalk.** Such active uses create a much more inviting setting for walking than the office windows, parking structures, parking lots, or blank walls that now line many downtown streets.
- **Presence of street trees,** which enhance walkability by shading pedestrians from hot sun, breaking strong winds, adding an intermediate sense of scale between a person and large buildings or broad open spaces, and making streets aesthetically appealing through their color, shape and texture.
- **Sidewalk quality**—the distinction between a moderate-quality sidewalks, with functional and clear paving and crosswalks, and enhanced sidewalks, with the added appeal of public art, street furniture such as benches and trash receptacles, higher-quality paving, or other design features. The diagram on page 2.19 maps Downtown walkability.



Active uses along the street—such as stores in Old Town (top)—make walking more appealing. Blank walls and other inactive stretches (bottom) discourage walking.

For decades, downtown streets have been shaped to serve cars better than pedestrians (upper photo). By contrast, sidewalks lined with active uses like stores, street trees and furniture, produce a pedestrian experience that encourages walking.

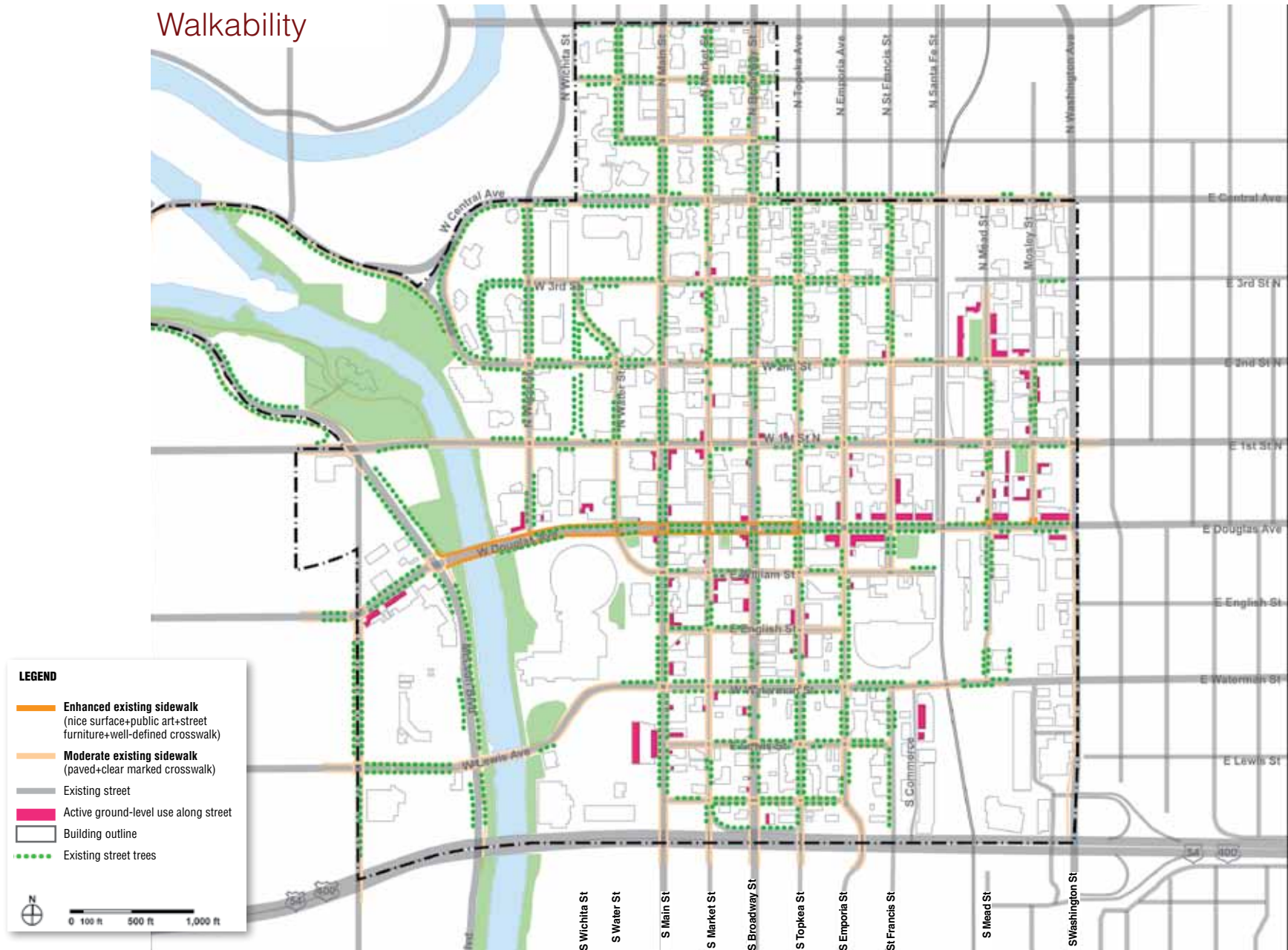


Conclusions

Downtown has the bones of a very good walking network, with sidewalks and crosswalks on nearly all streets. Nevertheless, significant improvements are needed:

- Active ground-floor uses have a nearly continuous presence at Old Town Square and along Douglas near Naftzger Park, but in most other cases tend to be separated enough that the blocks on which they're located feel empty. New retail should be carefully targeted to fill in the gaps along priority walking streets.
- New street trees should be added where missing or in poor health—particularly along sections of Market, Emporia, St. Francis, Commerce, Second, First, William, and English.
- Blocks with higher-quality paving and streetscape, particularly Douglas between McLean and Topeka, do not rank among downtown's most walkable. While higher-quality physical elements certainly improve the setting, a scarcity of active ground-floor uses creates a significant deterrent to walking. Some of downtown's more inviting blocks for walking have numerous active ground-floor uses but few streetscape enhancements. Streetscape improvements cannot by themselves transform sidewalk walkability; they should be accompanied by efforts to bring the ground floors of buildings to life.

Walkability





Old Town has succeeded in large part because different activities—including working, living and shopping—all take place together, supporting each other

Land Use:

What activities happen where?

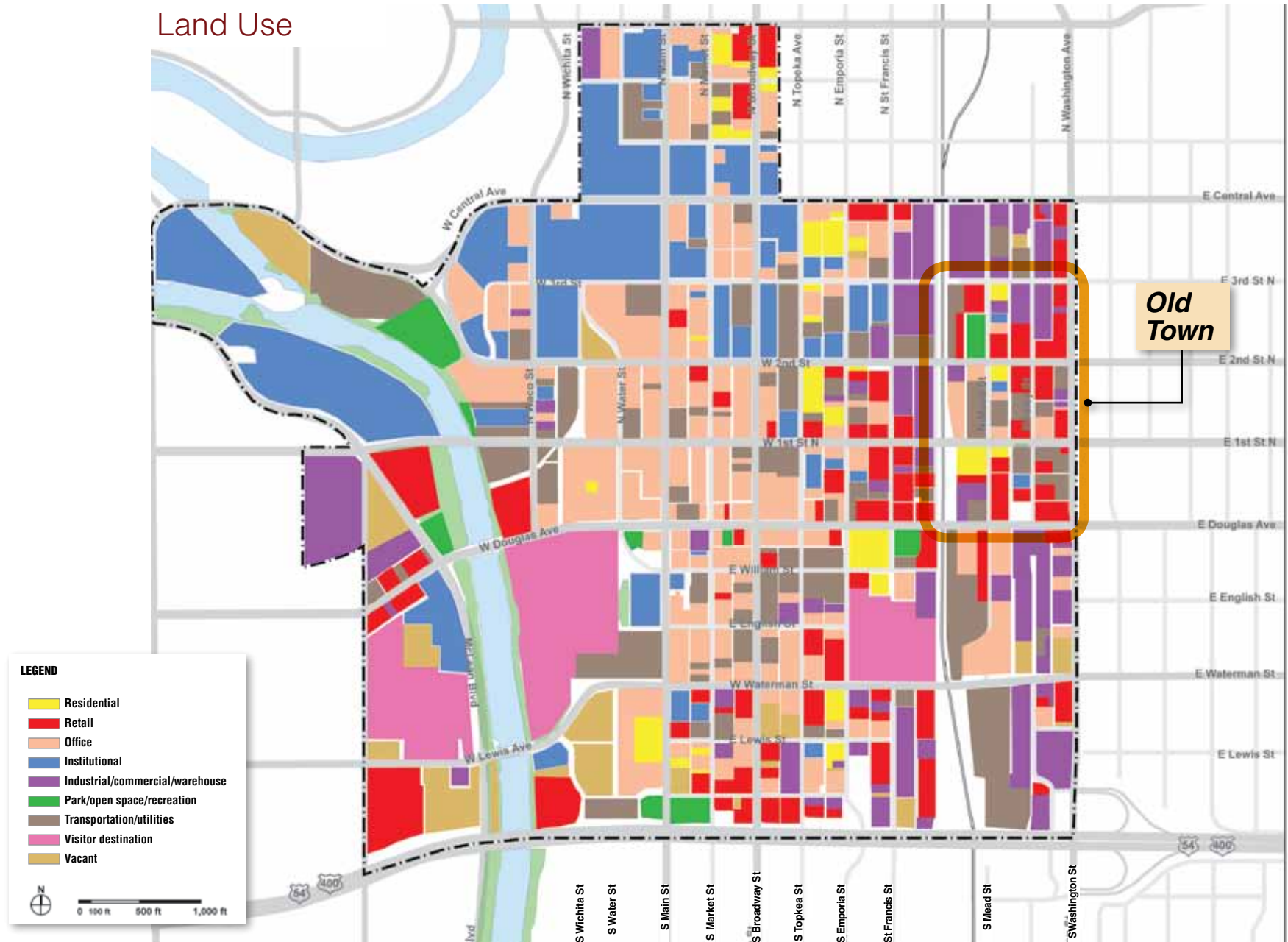
Criteria

The diagram on the facing page indicates primary uses of downtown properties.

Conclusions

The downtown districts that have seen the most reinvestment in the past decade and that tend to be regarded as most welcoming—Old Town, the Arena/Naftzger Park area, and Commerce Street Arts District—are also those with the most diverse uses. Combinations of residential, retail, office and institutional uses in particular are evident in these areas. By contrast, the traditional central business district, including Douglas between Waco and Topeka, is heavily dominated by office uses—making it no surprise that these sidewalks tend to be deserted evenings and weekends. Without question, offices remain central to downtown’s economy, but complementing them with more housing, retail, and institutional uses can help create a street environment that functions as a better setting for all uses.

Land Use



*The Douglas Bridge over the
Arkansas River*



Gateways and Landmarks:

What places mark arrival downtown?

Criteria

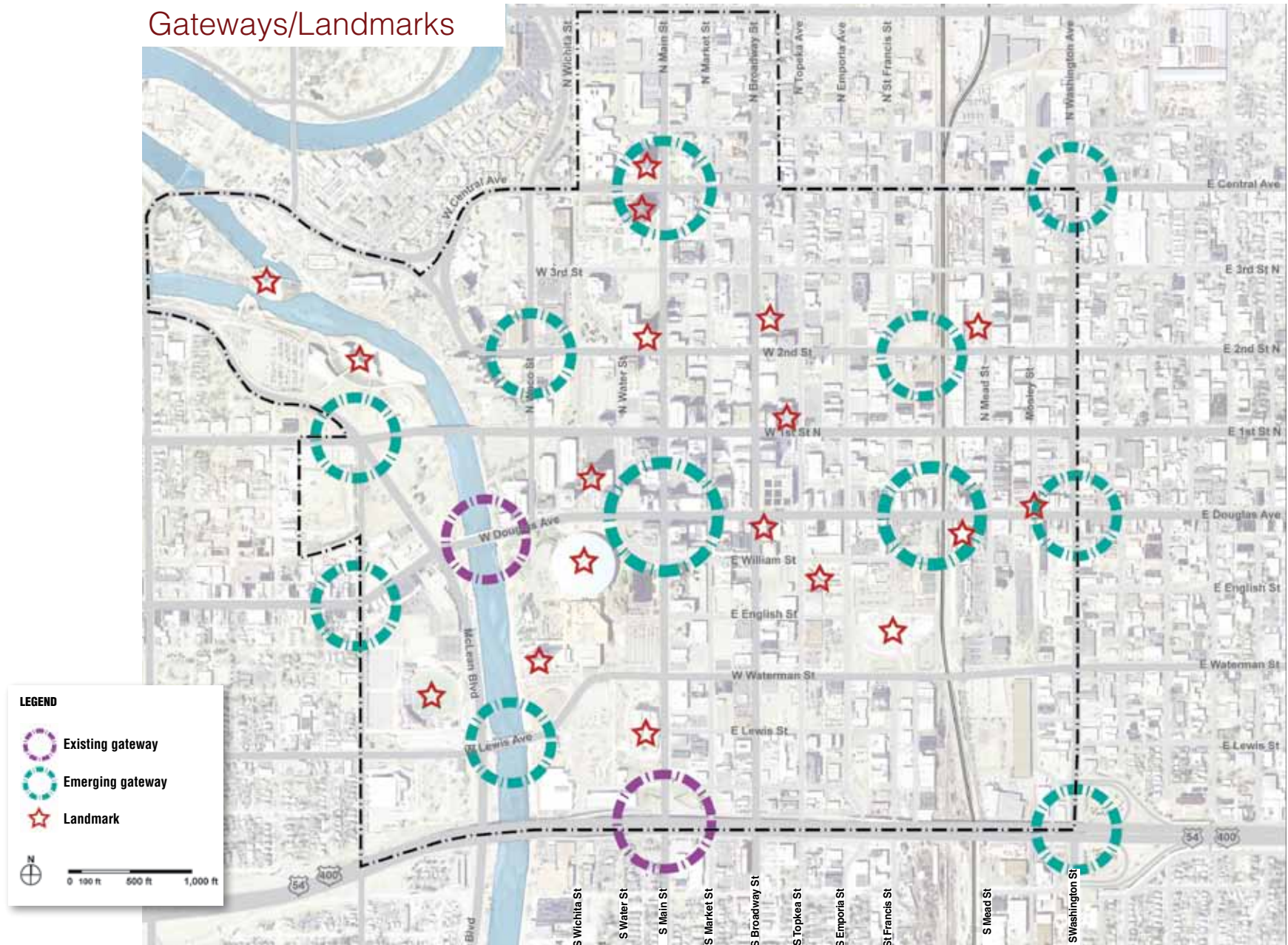
- Selected landmarks were chosen for their high visibility and distinctive form.
- Selected gateways, shown in the diagram on the facing page, were chosen as distinctive places along routes where significant traffic enters or leaves downtown, or crosses barriers like the Arkansas River and the railroad embankment.

Conclusions

Most of the gateways are *emerging* gateways—meaning they have distinctive physical characteristics that mark a transition into downtown (or one of its constituent areas), but they lack the full level of activity, development or other character that conveys a sense of dignity or quality. A combination of new development/redevelopment and public infrastructure improvements should be encouraged at every gateway to reinforce its presence.

Landmarks include a variety of buildings and places and can comprise historic architecture or modern design. Some are less architecturally distinguished but highly visible, and some are most important as community destinations. New development and public infrastructure improvements should treat these landmarks, and new ones, as important elements contributing to sense of place.

Gateways/Landmarks





Downtown has important relationships with neighborhoods on all sides.

Neighborhood Context:

What are downtown's relationships with surrounding neighborhoods?

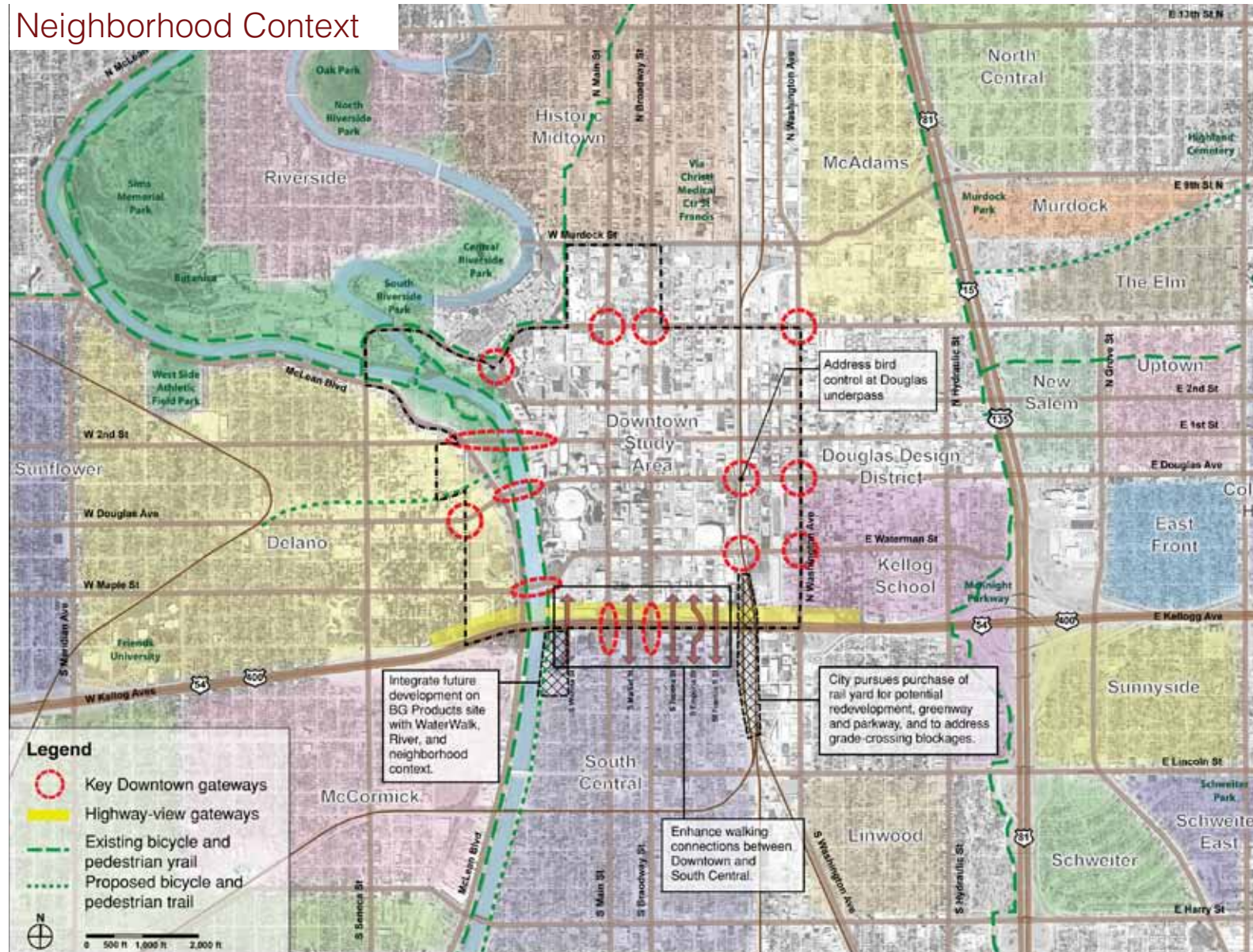
Criteria

The diagram notes key transportation connections and gateways.

Conclusions

Downtown can have important, mutually beneficial relationships with neighborhoods on all sides; ongoing reinvestment in both Delano's retail corridor and housing and in the Douglas Design District demonstrate this. Particular emphasis should be placed on improving north-south connections to Historic Midtown and Riverside to the north, and to South Central to the south. In both cases this requires overcoming barriers to walking—relatively empty blocks to the north, and the traffic around Kellogg to the south. Several specific recommendations are noted on the diagram.

Neighborhood Context





*Clockwise from above:
Sedgwick County Historic
Museum; City Arts at Old Town;
Mid-America All-Indian Center and
the Keeper of the Plains.*



Arts And Cultural Destinations:

Where do people come together around culture?

Criteria

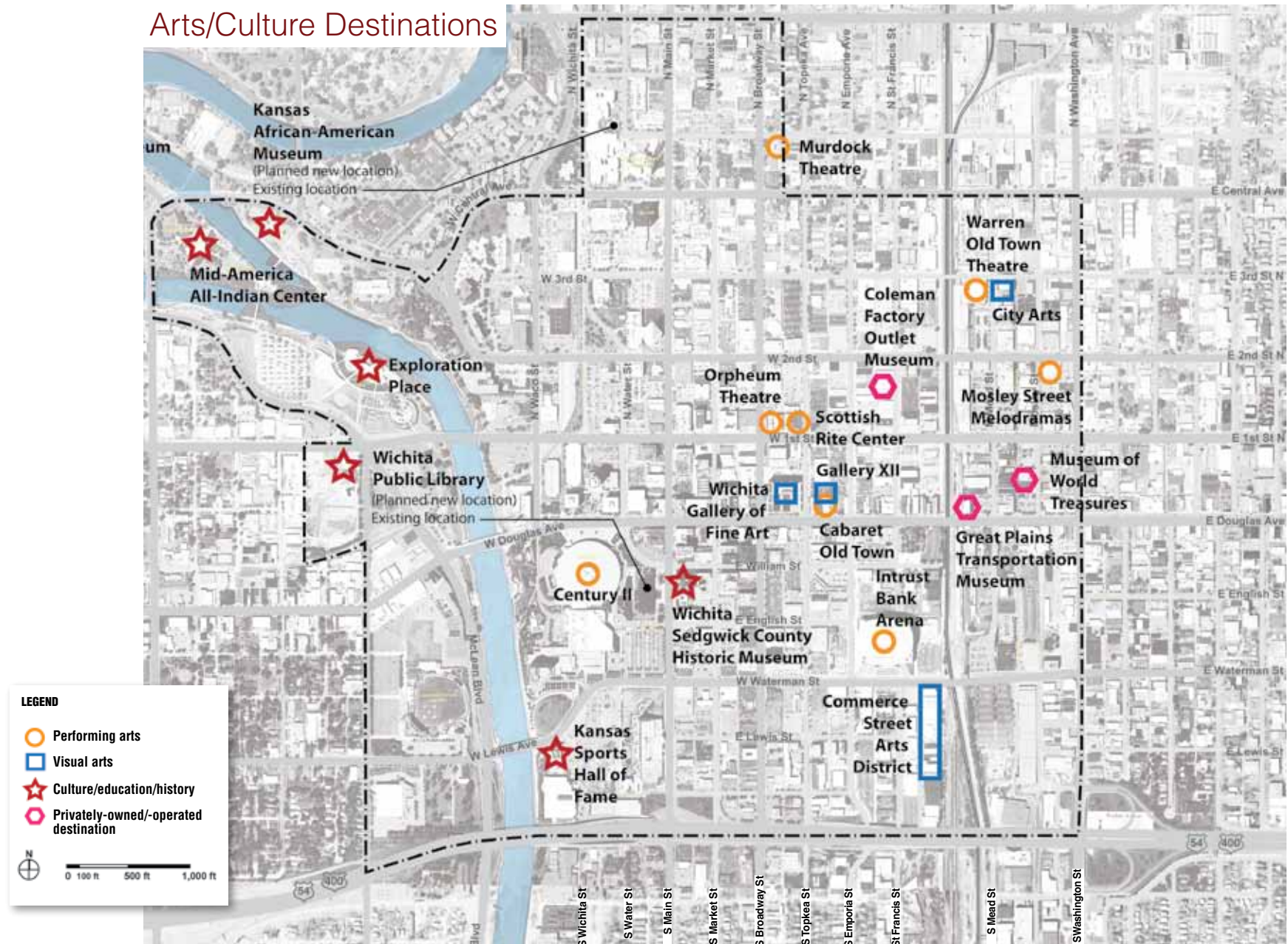
Downtown Wichita contains Kansas' most significant concentration of arts and cultural destinations, shown in the diagram on the facing page. They include:

- Performing-arts venues
- Museums and galleries
- Sports facilities
- Educational and historical institutions
- Other privately-owned destinations

Conclusions

Wichita should continue to focus on arts and cultural destinations as major generators of activity, complementing residential and commercial development. Notable concentrations of destinations occur along the Arkansas River, in Old Town, and along Commerce Street; these groups of institutions help raise the profiles of their individual constituent destinations. More isolated destinations, such as those in the downtown core, would benefit from concerted efforts to connect them to more people through better walking connections and increased housing and commercial development nearby.

Arts/Culture Destinations



Building and Site Inventory:

Which vacant sites or underutilized buildings hold promise for redevelopment? Which existing buildings are significant historic assets?

Criteria

The diagram on the facing page highlights:

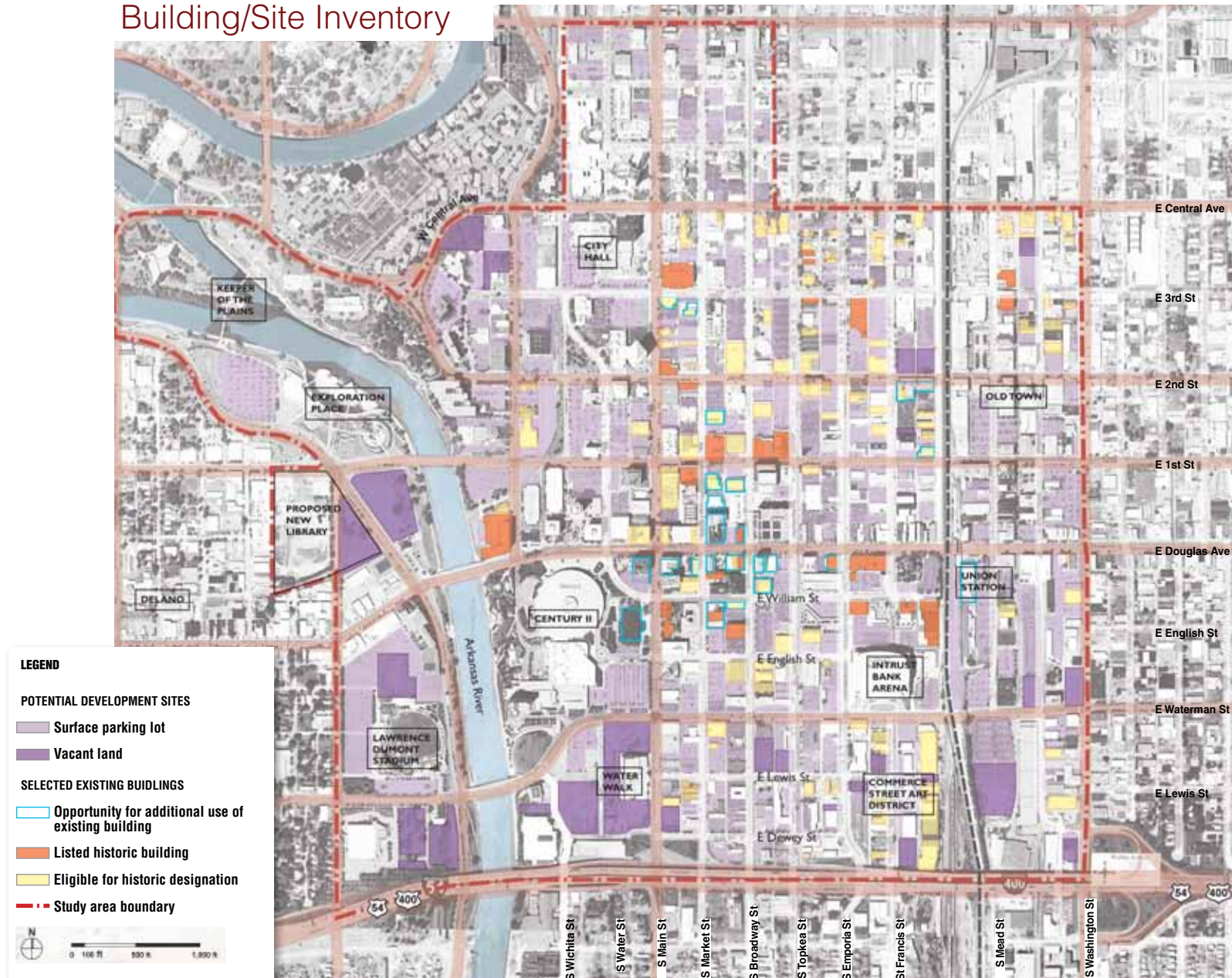
- Buildings that are officially listed as historic structures, and those eligible for listing
- Vacant/underutilized buildings of historic significance and/or substantial size
- Surface parking lots
- Vacant lots
- Other existing buildings and parking structures are uncolored

Conclusions

- The downtown core—particularly Douglas between Water and Emporia, and Market between English and First—contains a large number of significant but underutilized buildings. Special emphasis should be placed on finding ways to bring these buildings back to life, through alternative program (i.e., converting obsolete office buildings to residential lofts), adding parking where needed, or other strategies. The Exchange Place project, which will convert two obsolete office buildings into housing, demonstrates a highly appropriate approach in this area.
- Listed historic buildings are scattered on many blocks, and thus can assist many emerging areas as local catalysts through their contributions to sense of place.

- Numerous eligible historic buildings are also present in emerging areas like Old Town West, Commerce Street Arts District, and the Arena District. These can function as development catalysts for their architectural character and opportunity to utilize historic tax credits for development funding.
- Vacant land and surface parking lots abound downtown—totaling approximately 60% of land parcels in the study area. These offer numerous opportunities for infill development—good news for development feasibility, but also requiring conscious targeting of development in order to create needed concentrations of activity.

Building/Site Inventory



Building Height: How does building scale shape downtown as a place?

Criteria

The diagram categorizes building height in four ranges. Buildings in the 3- to 5-story range, and taller, most effectively convey a sense of downtown activity through their scale and program. Some areas with many buildings at least 2 stories high, such as Old Town and Commerce Street Arts District, also have this quality.

Conclusions

Allowable building height directly affects individual property value and the collective vitality of downtown by controlling potential development value. Downtown's continued vitality will depend on ongoing opportunity for investment in new and existing properties. At the same time, it is important that any new building fit in well with its context and contribute to the character of its setting. Any building that significantly exceeds the height of typical existing buildings around it should use architectural composition to make a fluid transition to their lower scale.

Significant historic buildings are present on many downtown blocks, and application of the Environs Law can constrain allowable height for new buildings nearby. Historic buildings and height should by no means be treated as mutually exclusive, however. New height restrictions must be considered in light of their impacts on overall downtown vitality as well as on Environs Law impacts. In many cases, historic properties themselves depend upon opportunity for renovations or additions—or density bonuses on other sites under common ownership—that help the properties remain

economically viable and support ongoing maintenance and use of the historic structure. One strategy, used successfully in many communities, is to require buildings' street facades to conform to a specific height range, typically tied to that of nearby historic structures, but to allow portions of structures further from the street to rise higher. This “step-back” concept for height produces a streetwall that reinforces historic context, pedestrian scale, and street cohesion, while enabling the added uses and development value important to downtown vitality.

The presence of buildings of at least 3 to 5 stories on most blocks downtown means that buildings of this scale or larger can be welcome in virtually any portion of downtown. In fact, development economics are expected to result in many if not most new buildings that fall within this height range, contributing to greater coherence of building scale.

Building Height

